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The Daily 202

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Facebook's political problems grow as its

co-founder calls for breaking up the social network

Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive and founder of Facebook, speaks at a developers conference in San Jose last week. (David Paul Morris/Bloomberg)

BY JAMES HOHMANN
with Joanie Greve and Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA: Mark Zuckerberg's got 99 problems, and Chris Hughes is now one.

Hughes, who cofounded Facebook with Zuckerberg in a Harvard dorm room 15 years ago, makes a passionate and lengthy case for breaking up the social media giant in an op-ed that just published online and will appear in Sunday's print edition of the New York Times. NPR and NBC aired interviews this morning with Hughes as part of his rollout.

"Mark's power is unprecedented and un-American," writes Hughes, a liberal who once owned the New Republic magazine. "Facebook's dominance is not an accident of history. The company's strategy was to beat every competitor in plain view, and regulators and the government tacitly — and at times explicitly — approved."

Hughes faults regulators for being asleep at the wheel and specifically criticizes the Federal Trade Commission for approving of Facebook's acquisition of Instagram and WhatsApp. "Mark's influence is staggering, far beyond that of almost anyone else in the private sector or in government," he writes. "The most problematic aspect of Facebook's power is Mark's unilateral control over speech. There is no precedent for his ability to monitor, organize and even censor the conversations of two billion people."

-- Facebook has increasingly been squeezed from the right and the left. The company's brand has taken an enormous hit since the Cambridge Analytica scandal,

which spawned a series of investigations and intense scrutiny on both sides of the Atlantic, from the European Union to Canada and the U.S. Congress.

-- Zuckerberg has been trying to get out front of calls to break up his company by calling for new regulations, expressing openness to more oversight and promising users recently that the social network will reorient itself to prioritize privacy. The 34-year-old is worth an estimated $62.3 billion. Forbes pegs him as the eighth richest person in the world.

Chris Hughes, the co-founder of Facebook who now wants to break up the company, speaks in 2010 in Boston. (Adam Hunger/Reuters)

-- Facebook isn't afraid of "a few more rules," Hughes explains, because the company can afford to comply with them and pay billions in fines. Facebook recorded $15 billion in revenue during the first three months of this year, for instance, putting the publicly traded company on a pace to rake in $60 billion this year. The tech giant disclosed to shareholders last month that it expects a fine

as high as $5 billion from the FTC for its mishandling of its users' personal information, and the markets shrugged.

Hughes believes that the federal government bringing an antitrust case is the only way to bring real accountability, which he believes is why Facebook is so strongly against it. "Mark may never have a boss, but he needs to have some check on his power," Hughes writes. "The American government needs to do two things: break up Facebook's monopoly and regulate the company to make it more accountable to the American people. … Just breaking up Facebook is not enough. We need a new agency, empowered by Congress to regulate tech companies. Its first mandate should be to protect privacy."

-- President Trump threatened last Friday to "monitor" social media sites for their "censorship of AMERICAN CITIZENS" on the day after Facebook permanently banned far-right figures and organizations including the conspiracy theory site Infowars. The company also permanently banned users including Louis Farrakhan, the founder of the Nation of Islam who has been accused of anti-Semitism, along with far-right figures Milo Yiannopoulos, Laura Loomer and Alex Jones, the founder of Infowars. The company said their presence on Facebook and Instagram had become "dangerous."

Warren vows to break up big tech if elected president

-- Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) has made breaking up Facebook and other big tech companies a major plank of her 2020 platform. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate subcommittee that oversees antitrust and competition policy, talks constantly about the danger of monopolies on the campaign trail. This is not some obscure debate for law school faculty lounges any longer. Crowds eat it up – in rural Iowa.

Hughes links Facebook's market power to the staggering, broader consolidation of corporate power. "In the past 20 years, more than 75 percent of American industries, from airlines to pharmaceuticals, have experienced increased concentration, and the average size of public companies has tripled," Hughes notes. "The results are a decline in entrepreneurship, stalled productivity growth, and higher prices and fewer choices for consumers."

He laments that Facebook has become almost too big to fail in the eyes of regulators. "The company's strategy was to beat every competitor in plain view, and regulators and the government tacitly — and at times explicitly — approved," he writes. "This means that every time Facebook messes up, we repeat an exhausting pattern: first outrage, then disappointment and, finally, resignation."

-- A bipartisan group of senators expressed frustration earlier this week with the slow-going federal probe into Facebook's privacy practices, pushing the FTC to move more swiftly and consider imposing tough punishments that target the company's top executives. "This investigation has been long delayed in conclusion — raising the specter of a remedy that is too little too late," Republican Sen. Josh Hawley (Mo.) and Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal

(Conn.) wrote in an open letter on Monday. “The public is rightly asking whether Facebook is too big to be held accountable. The FTC must set a resounding precedent that is heard by Facebook and any other tech company that disregards the law in a rapacious quest for growth.”

-- Democratic lawmakers like Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) have even been pushing the FTC to specifically and personally target Zuckerberg himself as part of its investigation.

Mark Zuckerberg appears to testify in the Hart Senate Office Building last year. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

-- Many senior Democrats on Capitol Hill were especially irate about the public support that senior Facebook executive Joel Kaplan showed for Brett Kavanaugh after Christine Blasey Ford came forward last year. The company said Kaplan, a Republican and Facebook's policy chief, was acting in his personal capacity when he sat behind Kavanaugh during his confirmation hearing and hosted a party at his house for the justice to celebrate his triumph despite the allegations of sexual assault. This led to strong internal backlash from employees at Facebook. During an all-staff meeting, Kaplan said he should have checked with Zuckerberg ahead of time.

The donnybrook strained some of the company's relationships on the Hill and put in stark relief for congressional Democrats that Facebook is neither their friend nor ally. Facebook reinforced this view the week before last by hiring another Republican legal operative who worked with Kavanaugh during George W. Bush's administration to be their general counsel. To be sure, the company has also hired some prominent privacy advocates lately for other jobs.

Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg has also lost a lot of her cachet with Democrats in

D.C. She admitted in November that she received information about the company's work with a Republican-aligned firm called Definers that conducted opposition research against the company's critics on the left, including Democratic donor George Soros.

-- Meanwhile, there are daily reminders of how central Facebook has become in American culture. Consider these three unrelated stories that have posted in the past day:

Thousands of people who police Facebook's site for offensive content are contractors, not employees, and they're starting to air their grievances about unsatisfactory working conditions. They're protesting micromanagement, pay cuts and inadequate counseling support while they perform one of Facebook's most demanding jobs. (Elizabeth Dwoskin)

Facebook is auto-generating videos that celebrate extremist images. A whistleblower's complaint to the Securities and Exchange Commission alleges the social media giant has exaggerated its success at staying ahead of extremists by taking down their posts. Instead, the company has inadvertently made use of extremist propaganda in promotional videos that collect a year's worth of user content to make snazzy videos. (AP)

Instagram still has no control over the spread of vaccine misinformation on its platform, two months

after Facebook promised that it would do a better job of combating the falsehoods. “Instagram executives said vaccine misinformation is not eligible for recommendation to its Explore, hashtag and search pages. But discussion about vaccines as a general topic is still allowed and can be recommended in these places," CNN reports. "An Instagram spokesperson added that its efforts are focused on vaccine misinformation, not the anti-vax movement. This means that Instagram wants to curtail false information about vaccines, but not ban people who identify as anti-vaxers or publish anti-vaccine posts.”

-- In his piece for the Times, Hughes apologizes for his role. “I’m disappointed in myself and the early Facebook team for not thinking more about how the News Feed algorithm could change our culture, influence elections and empower nationalist leaders,” he writes.

Hughes doesn’t fault Zuckerberg for trying to conquer the world. “Yet he has created a leviathan that crowds out entrepreneurship and restricts consumer choice,” he writes. “It’s on our government to ensure that we never lose the magic of the invisible hand.”

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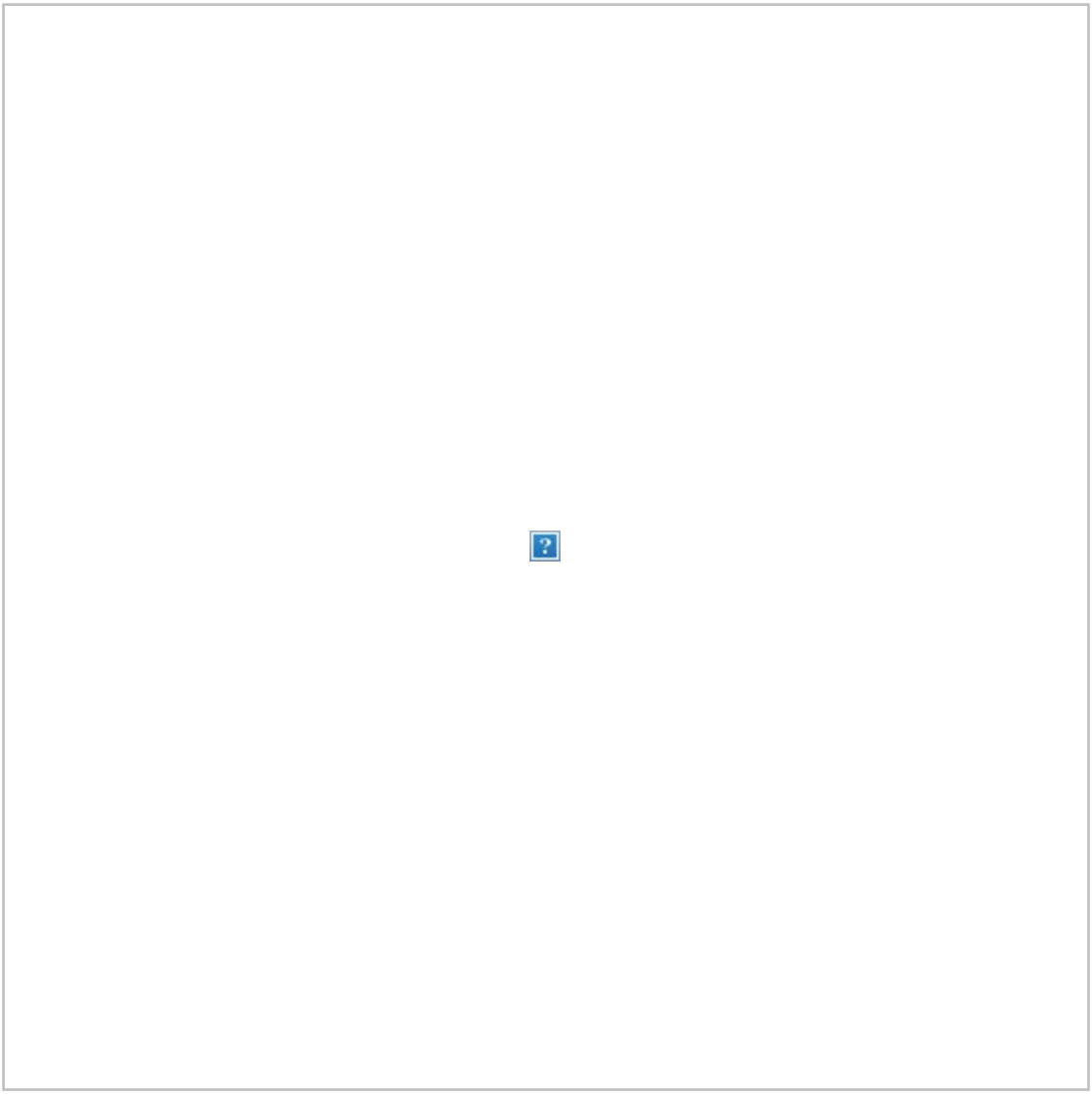

South Koreans watch TV today in the Seoul train station showing file footage of North Korea missile tests. (Ahn Young-joon/AP)

-- North Korea launched two short-range missiles. This is the second such test launch in less than a week amid rising tensions between Washington and Pyongyang. It came around 4:30 p.m. local time and appeared to have been fired from Sino-ri, a base that houses medium-range ballistic missiles. (Simon Denyer)

-- Kim Jong Un might be lashing out because of a

worsening food shortage. Denyer explains: “Analysts say there is no doubt that the ultimate blame for the humanitarian crisis rests with Pyongyang, which has spent hugely on nuclear advances and other military projects while neglecting the welfare of ordinary citizens. But leading medical and humanitarian experts also argue that U.S.-led sanctions — which include fuel imports — have also stifled North Korean agriculture and prevented the arrival of vital medical aid. … **A United Nations report issued Friday showed more than 10 million people do not have enough food to last until the next harvest.”**

-- Meanwhile, Beijing promised tit-for-tat retaliation if Trump follows through tomorrow with his threat to put new tariffs on $200 billion worth of Chinese goods. Anna Fifield and David J. Lynch report: “The Chinese warning — issued as China’s vice premier arrived in Washington — signaled that Beijing was prepared to take the same hard-line route as Trump and raise tariffs on American products in response. ‘An escalation in trade frictions is not in line with the American or Chinese interests or the interests of the world, and would thus be much to China’s regret,’ a spokesman for the Commerce Ministry said in a statement on its website. ‘But if the U.S. goes ahead with its tariff measures against China, China will have to resort to necessary countermeasures,’ the statement added.”

One student dead, eight others injured in Colorado school shooting

GET SMART FAST:

1. **The victim of the school shooting in suburban Denver was identified as Kendrick Castillo, an 18-year-old who fellow students say was killed after lunging at the gunman.** Castillo, a leader on his high school robotics team who loved cars and the outdoors, was set to graduate this week. (Bart Schaneman, Susan Svrluga and Moriah Balingit)

2. **The Vatican unveiled new rules for the way the church deals with abuse accusations, particularly those involving bishops and other higher-ups.** The new guidelines, signed by Pope Francis, ask dioceses to create public and accessible offices for receiving claims. (Chico Harlan)

3. **Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed a bill allowing more teachers to carry guns in schools.** The new law allows any teacher to volunteer to carry a weapon if their school district approves. Volunteers must undergo at least 144 hours of training, psychiatric evaluation and a drug screening. (Fox News)

4. **Voters in Denver approved the decriminalization of "magic mushrooms."** Hallucinogenic mushrooms will remain illegal in Denver and the rest of Colorado, but the vote endorses a change in the city's law that instructs police to make arresting people for personal possession or use "the lowest law enforcement priority." (Tom Jackman)

5. **Walmart announced it will stop selling tobacco products to customers under 21.** The retail giant also said it will phase out the sale of fruit- and dessert-flavored e-cigarettes starting July 1. (Abha Bhattara)

6. **California is now encouraging public school**

teachers to talk to their students about gender identity and to give advice to LGBTQ teenagers for navigating relationships and safe sex. The guidance doesn't require educators to teach anything, but some parents and conservative groups assailed the guidelines as an assault on parental rights. (AP)

7. **Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan revealed the name of their son: Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor.** The choice surprised many royal watchers, who expected the couple to choose a more traditional name like Spencer, Alexander or Philip. (Karla Adam and William Booth)

8. **South Africans went to the polls, but the nation's young people abstained en masse.** President Cyril Ramaphosa, widely expected to be reelected, cast his ballot in Soweto. But across the township, home to more than 1 million inhabitants, vast numbers of young people stayed home. (Max Bearak)

9. **Longtime New York Times reporter Robert Pear died at 69.** In his 40 years at the Times, Pear's byline appeared on more than 6,700 articles as he became a preeminent voice on health-care policy and how it affected Americans' everyday lives. (New York Times)

10. **Australians are circulating 46 million bank notes**

with typos. The Australian 50-dollar note is going around with the word “responsibility” spelled as “responsibilty” (albeit in very, very small font). (Rick Noack)

Committee votes to recommend the House hold Barr in contempt

THERE’S A BEAR IN THE WOODS:

-- The House Judiciary Committee voted along party lines to hold Attorney General Bill Barr in contempt of Congress, hours after Trump asserted executive

privilege over special counsel Bob Mueller's report. Rachael Bade, Carol D. Leonnig and Matt Zapotosky report: "Democrats could vote as early as next week on the Barr contempt citation ... That vote would enable House counsels to take Barr to civil court and try to persuade a judge to force him to release Mueller's evidence, one of many high-stakes legal fights between the executive and legislative branches. … House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Wednesday that Trump is 'becoming self-impeachable' because of all his efforts to fight congressional investigations, though she has remained firm in her resistance to initiate impeachment proceedings ahead of the 2020 election.

"**The Justice Department considered it important for the White House to assert executive privilege before the House voted on contempt because, in its view, doing so would effectively invalidate the citation** ... It believed that Barr could not be legitimately held in contempt for withholding materials over which the president had asserted executive privilege ... But if anything, Barr's move only redoubled Democrats' insistence to press ahead with contempt. During a day-long hearing, Democrats criticized the use of privilege as illegitimate because much of the Mueller report has already been made public — and because Trump allowed his aides to cooperate with the special counsel months ago."

-- Donald Trump Jr. has been subpoenaed by the Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee after the president's eldest son stonewalled for several weeks in response to a request for a second interview. Ashley Parker, Karoun Demirjian and Shane Harris report: "As negotiations over Trump Jr.'s testimony dragged on, committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.) became increasingly frustrated and believed that Trump Jr. was defying the committee's authority and not honoring his original agreement. … If Trump Jr. flouts the subpoena, it puts Burr in the awkward position of potentially taking Trump Jr. to court as the president continues his standoff with the House. ... Trump Jr. is 'exasperated' by the committee's actions, according to a person who has discussed the subpoena with him, because he already 'offered to continue to cooperate in writing.'

"**The panel is bringing back several key witnesses for second interviews to give lawmakers a chance to question people previously interviewed only by committee staffers** … But **concerns about Trump Jr.'s statements are potentially more problematic for the president.** According to a transcript of Trump Jr.'s testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, he told lawmakers that he did not tell his father about the Trump Tower meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya.

“Trump Jr.’s testimony to other committees was in line with the account he gave to the Senate Judiciary panel, several Democrats said. Yet in Mueller’s report, the president’s former lawyer, Michael Cohen, said he recalled being in Trump’s office when Trump Jr. talked about a meeting to get ‘adverse information’ on Clinton. Cohen told Mueller’s team that it appeared that father and son had previously discussed the subject. **Mueller never interviewed Trump Jr.**”

-- Trump’s legal team urged a federal judge last night to block the House Oversight Committee’s subpoena for financial statements from the president’s accounting firm, calling the request “unconstitutional.” Spencer S. Hsu reports: “In a 24-page filing, Trump’s legal team asked the D.C. court to block a committee subpoena to Trump’s accounting firm, Mazars USA, saying the panel’s demand ‘lacks a legitimate legislative purpose.’ Even if there were one, Trump’s lawyers argued, the newly elected Democratic-led House overstepped its authority by passing a campaign finance and ethics bill as its first legislation in January that would require, among other things, the president and the vice president to make public 10 years of tax returns.”

-- The New York State Senate approved legislation allowing congressional committees to access Trump’s state tax returns. Jeff Stein reports:

“The bill must still be approved by the State Assembly and signed by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D-N.Y.), but Cuomo has expressed support for the measure and Democrats have a majority in the legislature’s lower chamber. … New York’s legislation would not give House Democrats access to the six years of federal tax returns sought by House Ways and Means Committee Chair Richard E. Neal (D-Mass.). But the state returns could provide an unprecedented look into Trump’s New York business dealings, his income, and a range of other personal financial information, according to legal experts.”

-- The bigger picture: Trump's refusal to cooperate with Congress is setting the stage for a constitutional crisis. Devlin Barrett, Carol D. Leonnig and Josh Dawsey report: “On the surface, the fight over an unredacted copy of Mueller’s report — and its underlying investigative documents — hinges on disagreements over the law surrounding grand jury material and legal precedents. **But at its heart, Wednesday’s dispute is about the seemingly intractable conflict between House Democrats, who are seeking a public airing of damaging details about Trump, and the president, who has vowed to give them nothing. The two sides now appear headed for a court fight over the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, and at a faster pace than previous legal battles over executive privilege.** Each appears to be proceeding with an eye on how such a conflict might play

out in the 2020 race for president and the possibility, however faint, of impeachment proceedings.

"**In past administrations, conflicts over congressional access to White House documents and witnesses have often dragged on for a year or longer before reaching this stage of impasse.** … With the Mueller report, it took only weeks to reach the state, and may serve as an important test case for ongoing fights between the White House and Congress."

-- FBI officials will brief members of Florida's congressional delegation next week on suspected Russian hacking during the 2016 election. Politico's Gary Fineout reports: "The agency will sit down Republican Sen. Rick Scott ahead of the delegation meeting. … Mueller last month revealed the suspected hacking in a report on Russian interference in the 2016 election. The disclosure jolted Florida officials, who had previously insisted the Russians had been unsuccessful in their hacking efforts."

Venezuelan intelligence officers close in last night on National Assembly Vice President Edgar Zambrano to arrest him in Caracas. (Miguel Gutierrez/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- “Trump is questioning his administration’s aggressive strategy in Venezuela following the failure of a U.S.-backed effort to oust President Nicolás Maduro, complaining he was misled about how easy it would be to replace the socialist strongman with a

young opposition figure," per Anne Gearan, Josh Dawsey, John Hudson and Seung Min Kim. "The president's dissatisfaction has crystallized around national security adviser John Bolton … **Trump has said in recent days that Bolton wants to get him 'into a war'** — a comment he has made in jest in the past but that now belies his more serious concerns, one senior administration official said. Trump has complained over the last week that Bolton and others underestimated Maduro, according to three senior administration officials … Trump has expressed concern that Bolton has boxed him into a corner and gone beyond where he is comfortable.

"**The events of April 30 have effectively shelved serious discussion of a heavy U.S. military response, current and former officials as well as outside advisers said.** Rather, U.S. officials think time is on their side and that Maduro will fall of his own weight. … Trump is now not inclined to have any sort of military intervention in Venezuela … Trump has, in Oval Office meetings and phone calls with advisers, questioned his administration providing such strong support of [Juan] Guaidó. Some White House officials said Trump likes the charismatic leader, whom he has called courageous, but has wondered aloud whether he is ready to take over and about how much the administration really knows about him.

“**U.S. defense leaders regard any military scenario involving boots on the ground in Venezuela as a quagmire and warn that standoff weapons such as Tomahawk missiles run a major risk of killing civilians.** The White House has repeatedly asked for military planning short of an invasion, however. Officials said the options under discussion while Maduro is still in power include sending additional military assets to the region, increasing aid to neighboring countries such as Colombia and other steps to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Venezuelans outside of Venezuela. More forward-leaning options include sending ships to waters off Venezuela as a show of force. Other steps under discussion are intended for after Maduro is gone, when U.S. military personnel might be permitted inside Venezuela to help with humanitarian responses.”

-- Masked Venezuelan intelligence police detained the vice president of the National Assembly late last night in a dramatic operation in eastern Caracas, marking the first senior opposition official taken into custody by the Maduro regime in retaliation for last week’s failed military uprising. Anthony Faiola reports: “Assembly Vice President Edgar Zambrano live-tweeted the detention, saying his van was surrounded by forces from Venezuela’s SEBIN police force. When he refused to exit, Zambrano said, his vehicle was forcibly towed to the infamous Helicoide prison, a notorious holding area for political prisoners. The move came after Zambrano

became one of 10 opposition officials charged with treason, conspiracy and rebellion by the pro-Maduro Supreme Court in connection to the April 30 plot. Thus far, the leader of the uprising — Guaidó, who has been recognized as Venezuela's rightful leader by the United States and more than 50 other nations — has not been charged."

-- U.S. allies in Latin America want change in Venezuela, but they're very much against military intervention. Karen DeYoung reports: "Latin Americans, who already see the Venezuelan crisis spilling over their borders in the form of millions of refugees, appreciate U.S. interest and determination. … [But] the history of U.S. invasion and occupation in the region, along with covert involvement in regime change, is long and unlamented. Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Chile, and more. Even those leaders who might be happy to see [Maduro] ousted with U.S. force believe there would be a heavy price to pay among their own constituents."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo boards his plane to depart Baghdad International Airport on Tuesday night. (Mandel Ngan/Pool/Reuters)

MORE ESCALATION AGAINST IRAN:

-- Mike Pompeo canceled a scheduled visit to Greenland so he can return to Washington to manage the Iran situation. (AP)

-- The Trump administration issued new sanctions against Iran, targeting its metal exports, hours after the Iranian president threatened to start enriching more uranium if it doesn't get relief from U.S. measures that are crippling its economy. The new round of sanctions, outlined in an executive order, apply to Iranian iron, steel, aluminum and copper, Carol Morello reports: "Trump said the newest sanctions target a sector that generates 10 percent of its export revenue. 'Tehran can expect further actions unless it fundamentally alters its conduct,' Trump said. 'Since our exit from the Iran deal, which is broken beyond repair, the United States has put forward 12 conditions that offer the basis of a comprehensive agreement with Iran. I look forward to someday meeting with the leaders of Iran in order to work out an agreement and, very importantly, taking steps to give Iran the future it deserves.'"

-- U.S. government sources say that Iran has approved attacks on American troops, NBC News

Pentagon correspondent Courtney Kube reports: “The intelligence shows that an Iranian official discussed activating Iranian-backed groups to target Americans, but did not mention targeting the militaries of other nations, the officials said. Among the specific threats the U.S. military is now tracking, officials say, are possible missile attacks by Iranian dhows, or small ships, in the Persian Gulf; attacks in Iraq by Iranian-trained Shiite militia groups; and attacks against U.S. ships by the Houthi rebels in Yemen. … (They) say that in addition to learning that an Iranian official had discussed attacks on Americans, the U.S. began seeing the movement of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in various places across the region, prompting the commander of U.S. Central Command, Marine Corps Gen. Frank McKenzie, to request additional forces move to the region.”

Former Trump White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci appears on CBS's "Big Brother: Celebrity Edition" last year. He's pictured with Dina Lohan. (Monty Brinton/CBS)

THE REALITY TV PRESIDENCY:

-- At a conference last night in Las Vegas for hedge fund investors, former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci interviewed the man who fired him: Former White House chief of staff John Kelly. They said they've become friends and

vented about their time in the Trump administration. The Daily Beast's Tarpley Hitt reports: "Scaramucci questioned the former chief of staff about … curbing the president's Twitter use ('That's not my job.'), the Mueller Report ('I tried aggressively to stay out of it.'), and whether Trump is a stable genius ('I wouldn't pass judgement on either of those.')"

-- During the first stop of her latest tell-all tour, Stormy Daniels said she's not sure if Trump, who she says had an extramarital affair with her, is worse than her former lawyer, Michael Avenatti. The adult-film star also said she'll apologize to first lady Melania Trump only when "she apologizes to the country." The Daily Beast's Amy Zimmerman reports: "Near the end of the evening, an audience member asked Daniels about Trump's hypothetical future downfall. … 'Allowing someone to get away with things that are definitely illegal sets a very terrifying precedent,' Daniels continued, explaining to the crowd that she was choosing her words very deliberately. 'It's basically a green light.' 'Do I think he'll be re-elected? I don't know,' she concluded. 'I hope not.'"

-- The Florida Bar said an investigation will proceed into whether one of Trump's closest allies on the Hill, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.), attempted to intimidate Michael Cohen, who is now in prison after arranging hush money payments to Daniels. The Tampa Bay

Times's Steve Contorno reports: "A grand jury-like panel called the Grievance Committee will next decide whether there is probable cause that Gaetz's tweet broke the state Supreme Court's rules for lawyers. … In moving the case against Gaetz to this step, the Florida Bar is also signaling that its initial review determined that the allegations against Gaetz would, if proven true, be a violation of the rules. … The complaint against Gaetz stems from a menacing tweet he sent on Feb. 27, the eve of Cohen's testimony before a House committee. Gaetz wrote: 'Do your wife & father-in-law know about your girlfriends? Maybe tonight would be a good time for that chat. I wonder if she'll remain faithful when you're in prison. She's about to learn a lot… .'"

American Conservative Union Chairman Matt Schlapp, a lobbyist, appears with his wife, Mercedes, at the Conservative Political Action Conference, which he runs, in 2017. (Mike Theiler/AFP/Getty Images)

THE SWAMP IS NOT DRAINED:

-- Trump derailed a bipartisan casino bill yesterday after a high-priced lobbyist married to one of his staffers said that doing so would hurt 2020 candidate and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D). Mike DeBonis, Felicia Sonmez and Josh Dawsey report: “The

intervention by Trump, contained in a morning tweet, eroded Republican support and prompted House Democrats to postpone a vote on the measure, which would pave the way for a new Massachusetts tribal casino. The bill, H.R. 312, would confirm the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe's sovereignty over 321 acres of land — including the Taunton, Mass., site eyed for the casino project. It was scheduled for a House vote Wednesday under expedited procedures requiring a two-thirds majority to pass, reflecting its broad support."

Follow the money: American Conservative Union Chairman Matthew Schlapp, who organizes CPAC, is lobbying for Twin River Management Group, which operates two Rhode Island casinos that fear the competition from a new casino across the state line. Schlapp's wife, Mercedes, is White House strategic communications director. "The singular focus on Warren appeared to reflect a strategy embraced by Schlapp, who focused on the senator in a Wednesday morning tweet and an email he sent to Republicans on Capitol Hill Tuesday," per Mike, Felicia and Josh. "According to a person familiar with the circumstances surrounding the tweet, Trump was happy to attack the project once he learned it was a key priority for Warren. … In a brief phone interview, Schlapp asked for questions to be texted to him but did not respond to a text or a subsequent phone call."

Irony alert: Warren is not actually a sponsor of the bill. She co-sponsored similar legislation in the last Congress, but there's no pending Senate bill pertaining to the tribe. "It is also not lost on anybody that a lobbyist for the Rhode Island casino seems to have a very tight relationship with the White House," said Rep. Joe Kennedy III (D-Mass.), who represents the district where the new casino would go. "It's sad. The consequence of this is going to be that the tribe that greeted the Pilgrims gets hurt once again by the U.S. government."

-- Trump publicly endorsed a super PAC run by his allies, America First Action, after strenuously criticizing such groups during the 2016 election. Michelle Ye Hee Lee reports: "In October 2015, then-candidate [Trump] railed against his opponents and the political committees raising huge sums to try and boot him out of the primaries. 'They're in total cahoots with their [super] PACs, which they're not allowed to be,' Trump told The Washington Post at the time. … But on Tuesday, [Trump] made a sharp about-face … Candidates and the independent super PACs that support them have increasingly found ways to work together without breaking laws barring outright coordination. But the Trump reelection campaign's statement appeared to go further than any other."

-- "The White House revoked my press pass. It's not just me — it's curtailing access for all journalists," by

Post columnist Dana Milbank: “For the past 21 years, I have had the high privilege of holding a White House press pass, a magical ticket that gives the bearer a front-row seat to history. … But no more. The White House eliminated most briefings and severely restricted access to official events. And this week came the coup de grace: After covering four presidents, I received an email informing me that Trump’s press office had revoked my White House credential. … I strongly suspect it’s because I’m a Trump critic. The move is perfectly in line with Trump’s banning of certain news organizations, including The Post, from his campaign events and his threats to revoke White House credentials of journalists he doesn’t like.”

-- White House officials acknowledged they're slashing the number of journalists who hold “hard “press passes to get into the building. But they claim it's not about limiting access. Paul Farhi reports: “White House press secretary Sarah Sanders explicitly denied that, saying the changes were prompted by security concerns, not to punish journalists. ... Sanders said the new measures were prompted by the U.S. Secret Service’s concern about the proliferation of hard passes, particularly over the past three years. It’s unclear exactly how many journalists hold hard passes, but White House officials say there could be as many as a thousand in existence.”

A full carrier of Chevy Cruze cars leaves the General Motors auto factory in Lordstown, Ohio. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

THE REST OF THE DOMESTIC AGENDA:

-- Trump tweeted support for a plan by General Motors to sell a recently shuttered plant in Ohio to Workhorse Group, an electric vehicle company that employs fewer than 100 people. Heather Long reports: “Representatives of both companies expressed optimism that they can complete a deal, although they stressed

that talks are in early stages and that any agreement would have to be approved by the United Automobile Workers union. … But the UAW indicated it would continue to push for GM to bring a new vehicle to Lordstown. … Trump promised to bring back blue-collar jobs to the Rust Belt, and the closing of the Lordstown factory, located in a county that swung from blue to red in the last presidential election, has been a sore mark on his promises to working America."

-- Trump will ask the Supreme Court to prevent lower courts from imposing nationwide injunctions against his policies. Bloomberg News's Margaret Talev and Greg Stohr report: Vice President "Pence complained Wednesday in a speech to the conservative Federalist Society that federal district courts have imposed more nationwide injunctions against Trump than the first 40 presidents combined. … The Trump administration has already tried on several occasions to persuade the Supreme Court to curb nationwide injunctions."

-- Internal memos reveal that EPA leaders ignored the advice of the agency's own scientists and lawyers, who urged the officials to issue an outright ban on asbestos. The New York Times's Lisa Friedman reports: "Last month's rule kept open a way for manufacturers to adopt new uses for asbestos, or return to certain older uses, but only with E.P.A. approval. Andrew Wheeler, the E.P.A. administrator, said when the rule was issued that it

would significantly strengthen public health protections. But in the memos, dated Aug. 10, more than a dozen of E.P.A.'s own experts urged the agency to ban asbestos outright, as do most other industrialized nations."

-- The House Appropriations Committee voted to block a new Trump administration rule allowing health workers to refuse to provide services that violate their religious beliefs. Erica Werner reports: "The measure by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) would prevent spending to implement the new rule, which Trump announced last week during a speech before faith leaders. The broad new rule allows health-care providers, insurers and employers to refuse to provide or pay for services that violate their religious or moral beliefs, such as abortion or assisted suicide ... Republicans argued against Lee's amendment, describing it as a 'poison pill' that would ensure that the broader legislation being debated Wednesday — a sweeping spending bill for the Health and Human Services, Labor and Education departments — would never become law."

Trump jokes after supporter reportedly suggests shooting migrants

THE IMMIGRATION WARS:

-- The number of border crossers detained by U.S. authorities topped 100,000 for the second consecutive month in April. Nick Miroff reports: “U.S. Customs and Border Protection detained 109,144 migrants along the boundary with Mexico last month, a 6 percent increase from March, as monthly arrests reached their highest point since 2007. **Unauthorized border**

crossings have more than doubled in the past year, and they are on pace to exceed 1 million on an annual basis … 'Our apprehension numbers are off the charts,' Carla Provost, chief of the Border Patrol, said in testimony to senators … 'We cannot address this crisis by shifting more resources. It's like holding a bucket under a faucet. It doesn't matter how many buckets we have if we can't turn off the flow.' … DHS officials for the first time this week said the agency is running out of space to jail single adult migrants, who arrived in April at the highest level in five years. One DHS official warned of a complete border breakdown if single adults who cross illegally can no longer be detained and deported."

-- Nearly half of white Republicans say it would bother them "some" or "a lot" to "hear people speak a language other than English in a public place," according to a new Pew survey. Eighteen percent of white Democrats said they would be bothered by hearing a foreign language, compared to 47 percent of white Republicans. (Christopher Ingraham)

-- Immigration and Customs Enforcement spent nearly a million dollars on iPhone hacking equipment made by tech company Grayshift. Forbes's Thomas Brewster reports: "The Atlanta-based company makes the GrayKey, previously described as the world's best iPhone hacking tech for police and intelligence agents, allowing them to break passcodes and retrieve

information from inside Apple devices. The contract, signed just last week, takes the immigration department's spend with the company to over $1.2 million, following a $384,000 Grayshift deal last year. That's the most spent on the superpowered iPhone hacking service by any government department, local or federal, looking across public records."

-- RAICES, a nonprofit immigrant legal services group, accused ICE of preventing immigrants from receiving free legal help at a detention facility in Karnes, Tex. NBC News's Suzanne Gamboa reports: "The complaints are many and include such things as ICE failing to make space available for private meetings with clients, setting new requirements for lawyers to meet with clients, so that fewer people can meet with attorneys, and eliminating a 'walk-in' signup list. … In its eight-page complaint, RAICES said that ICE has stopped following its own policies, based on its own detention standards, that were implemented in 2014. The policies, though imperfect, allowed people detained in Karnes access to counsel at no government expense, RAICES said."

'I just happen to have it with me': Trump brings chart measuring relief aid to rally

2020 WATCH:

-- Campaigning for reelection during a rally in Florida last night, Trump pledged more federal aid for the state and blamed Democrats for his administration's flagging hurricane recovery efforts. Toluse Olorunnipa and Reis Thebault report: “Trump announced he would allocate $448 million of Housing and Urban Development recovery money to the Florida relief effort. Trump has

also sought to blame Democrats for the lack of aid and has claimed Puerto Rico is undeserving of more federal funds to deal with the aftermath of devastating hurricanes in 2017. To illustrate his point, Trump pulled a small bar chart out of his suit coat and held it up to the crowd. Puerto Rico, he said, has received more relief money than any other state or territory, falsely claiming that the federal government had provided Puerto Rico with $91 billion in aid. 'That's Puerto Rico,' Trump said, pointing to the tallest bar. 'And they don't like me.'"

-- Kamala Harris is adopting a new strategy to confront Trump more directly, reacting to Joe Biden's successful rollout in the wake of disagreements among her top advisers about the extent to which the California Democrat should embrace far-left policies that could make her unelectable in a general election. The New York Times's Astead W. Herndon and Jonathan Martin report: "She has repeatedly sought to placate the left since setting her sights on the presidency — an impulse many in her orbit say is reinforced by her campaign chair, Maya Harris, her sister. At the same time, other Harris advisers and allies have winced at some of the senator's overtures to liberals … But two recent events — Ms. Harris's insistent questioning of Mr. Barr at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last week, and [Biden's] multiday spat with Mr. Trump — have been clarifying moments for Ms. Harris and her aides, demonstrating the value of elevating her voice of

opposition to the president and seeking direct confrontation with the White House, according to her advisers."

-- Pete Buttigieg blindsided Harris in California, capturing the attention of state Democrats with ties to the LGBTQ and Hollywood communities. Politico's Carla Marinucci reports: "Democratic strategist Garry South says the growing buzz about Buttigieg's success in wedging his way into California's lucrative fundraising base has shocked many longtime politics watchers in the state. 'I think the amazing thing is that nobody is ceding California to Kamala Harris ... no one is abandoning California to the native daughter — which tells you something,' he says. … Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who presides over one of the country's most lucrative Democratic fundraising ATMs, hasn't yet endorsed in the crowded 2020 presidential race. He freely admits experiencing some angst over the situation. 'I love Kamala Harris, she's a dear friend,'' he says of the former state attorney general, who has scheduled a dizzying round of fundraisers in the state next week. But, Garcetti notes, Buttigieg 'is one of my closest mayor friends.'"

-- Elizabeth Warren called for spending $100 billion in federal money to address the opioid crisis. Annie Linskey and Katie Zezima report: "Most Democrats believe their path to the White House involves winning back industrial states such as Wisconsin and

Pennsylvania whose populations have been badly hurt by addiction … 'Trump has been all talk and no action,' Warren said … She waved off a question about whether the president, who campaigned on solving the opioid crisis, had at least focused attention on the issue. … 'He hasn't made it a priority,' [Warren said]. ... Trump appointed a commission in 2017 that made 56 recommendations on combating the scourge. The administration has also successfully prodded China to tighten its regulation of fentanyl-related substances."

-- The "electability" argument ignores the reality that primary voters always end up choosing a candidate who reflects the political moment, Amy Walter writes in a smart piece for the Cook Political Report: "This year, many Democrats are using 2016 as the lens through which they view the 2020 campaign. … A lot of Democrats look at Biden and think he would've won in 2016 and as such see him as the safest choice for 2020. If however, Biden starts to look like a risky bet (he stumbles in a debate, bumbles on the trail, etc) the rationale on which his campaign is based collapses. The winner of the 2020 primary will be the candidate who can prove he/she is best suited for the unique challenges of the upcoming campaign, not the one who is still fighting over what they should do the same/differently from 2016."

-- Former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz appears to be backing away from an independent presidential

bid, fueling speculation that Biden's entry into the race has made him reconsider. The Daily Beast's Sam Stein and Gideon Resnick report: "Erin McPike, a spokesperson for Schultz, said there was a simple reason for [recent] canceled events: he was 'taking a break while he is recovering from back surgery.' … But Schultz has also dialed down the elements of his campaign prep that don't actually require public appearances. He has not posted to Facebook or Instagram since April 30. … According to Facebook's ad archives, Schultz has not run an ad on the platform since April 23, when his account posted a spot that declared 'It's Time To Un-Partisan.' Since Easter, Schultz has tweeted just twice."

-- Republicans hired nine regional directors for Trump's 2020 reelection team. From the Wall Street Journal's Michael C. Bender: "The campaign has carved the nation into nine regions as it decides how best to spend its resources on contacting voters, motivating supporters and, eventually, getting them to the polls on Election Day, according to campaign officials. Each area will be overseen by a newly hired regional political director. One of those regions is focused almost exclusively on Michigan and Pennsylvania, both states that hadn't supported a Republican presidential candidate for 28 years until Mr. Trump. Wisconsin, which hadn't supported a Republican for 32 years until 2016, is in a region that also includes Ohio, a traditional battleground."

-- Bernie Sanders's 2009 tax returns showed that a series of errors caused him to underpay his taxes by $4,479. The Wall Street Journal's Richard Rubin reports: "The handwritten document contained four mistakes: three that reduced Mr. Sanders's reported taxes and one that increased them ... according to Illinois accountant Glen Birnbaum."

-- "What it's like to watch my college boyfriend, Beto O'Rourke, run for president," by Sasha Watson for The Post's Sunday Magazine: "I found myself in the strange circumstance of sitting in my car on a late-winter afternoon and recalling — with a [reporter] — life in my early 20s, and what it had been like for Beto and me to fall in love. … I've received more messages from reporters since then, but I've mostly stopped responding. … They don't see a story in the fond or funny recollections I might offer, but there is a story, I think, and it's not in the 'salacious details' one reporter told me he was seeking. Instead, it has to do with seeing a person emerge from the long tunnel of memory and shared history to stand in the public eye; about seeing someone become more than a person — or maybe less — when he's turned into a symbol."

-- Mitch McConnell has embraced the nickname "Cocaine Mitch." A shirt sold on the majority leader's campaign website that features his likeness and a dusting of cocaine has gone viral. Reis Thebault

reports: “Roughly a year ago, GOP Senate candidate from West Virginia and former coal magnate Don Blankenship aired a campaign advertisement that referred to McConnell, without any context, as ‘Cocaine Mitch.’ It was an apparent nod to a years-old allegation that the family of McConnell’s wife, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, has a shipping background connected to drug dealers. … Some policy experts have criticized McConnell and his campaign for selling products that reference and, they say, make light of drug issues.”

A vial of the measles, mumps and rubella virus (MMR) vaccine. (Lindsey Wasson/Reuters)

VACCINATE YOUR KIDS:

-- The brother, sister and a niece of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. accused their relative of spreading misinformation about vaccines. They write an op-ed for Politico: “Robert F. Kennedy Jr. … is part of this campaign to attack the institutions committed to reducing the tragedy of preventable infectious diseases. He has

helped to spread dangerous misinformation over social media and is complicit in sowing distrust of the science behind vaccines. We love Bobby. He is one of the great champions of the environment. His work to clean up the Hudson River and his tireless advocacy against multinational organizations who have polluted our waterways and endangered families has positively affected the lives of countless Americans. We stand behind him in his ongoing fight to protect our environment. However, on vaccines he is wrong."

-- A Republican state legislator in Texas attacked a leading vaccine scientist on Twitter, accusing the doctor of "sorcery." Deanna Paul reports: "It started with a report published Monday by the Texas Department of State Health Services that noted the state recorded a 14 percent rise in parents opting out of their children's vaccinations. It was a new statistic that alarmed Peter Hotez, professor and dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. … Hotez took his concerns about the report to Twitter. And then he received an unexpected, seething personal attack from the Republican state legislator, Rep. Jonathan Stickland. 'You are bought and paid for by the biggest special interest in politics,' Stickland wrote. 'Do our state a favor and mind your own business. Parental rights mean more to us than your self enriching 'science.'""

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

The Colorado governor recognized the heroism of the high school senior who died protecting fellow students:

A reporter for Denver's Fox affiliate tweeted this photo from the school:

The ghostwriter of “Art of the Deal” reacted to the New York Times's story on Trump's tax returns:

A conservative commentator highlighted these remarks from Trump ally Lindsey Graham, who argued that Bill Clinton was subject to impeachment for failing to comply with congressional subpoenas:

A Politico reporter remembered this story about the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman after the panel subpoenaed Trump's son:

A Republican senator appeared hesitant to define the acting White House chief of staff's role in disaster talks as “constructive”:

A Cook Political Report editor highlighted these numbers about how voters' opinions have changed since 2016:

A New York public defender called for an end to mass incarceration:

The British royal family shared this photo of Queen Elizabeth II meeting her newest great-grandchild:

Archie Comics celebrated the baby's name:

The communications director for C-SPAN looked back on this turn-of-the-century ad:

And a Times reporter shared this detail about a fitting tribute to Robert Pear, one of the kindest journalists we've interacted with in Washington:

GOOD READS:

-- "A conservative Christian group is pushing Bible classes in public schools nationwide — and it's working," by Julie Zauzmer: "Scenes of Bible classes in public school could become increasingly common across the United States if other states follow Kentucky's lead in passing legislation that encourages high schools to teach the Bible. Activists on the religious right, through their legislative effort Project Blitz, drafted a law that

encourages Bible classes in public schools and persuaded at least 10 state legislatures to introduce versions of it this year. Georgia and Arkansas recently passed bills that are awaiting their governors' signatures. Among the powerful fans of these public-school Bible classes: President Trump. 'Numerous states introducing Bible Literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the Bible,' Trump tweeted in January. 'Starting to make a turn back? Great!'"

-- "Nipsey Hussle had a plan to beat gentrification — in South L.A. and across the U.S.," by the Los Angeles Times's Angel Jennings: "In the months before Hussle was gunned down in front of his clothing store in late March, the rapper was working to bring economic development to the blighted blocks around Slauson and Crenshaw Boulevard, but on his own terms. He wanted more for his community, but he wanted the changes to be driven from within."

-- Bill Burns, the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former deputy secretary of state, says Trump's deal for Arab-Israeli peace is "doomed" by delusions in an op-ed for The Post: "In keeping with his disdain for conventional wisdom and his bent for disruption, Trump might bury what is still the only viable plan of action for Israelis and Palestinians, without offering anything resembling a workable substitute. Neither Trump nor his

son-in-law and chief negotiator, Jared Kushner, invented the steady decay of the two-state solution in recent years, or the pathologies of regional leaders consumed by their grievances and short-term political concerns. … Based on what can be gleaned about the new plan, however, Trump and Kushner appear to be animated by a set of terminally flawed assumptions and illusions. … The administration has effectively abandoned dialogue with the Palestinian leadership and marginalized Palestinian concerns, embracing instead the agenda of the Israeli right. … In 3½ decades of government service, I never saw an American president concede so much, so soon, for so little."

HOT ON THE LEFT:

"Meghan McCain's Husband Ben Domenech Goes on Unhinged Homophobic Rant Against 'Cuck' Seth Meyers," from the Daily Beast: "The View host Meghan McCain seemed pretty uncomfortable by the end of her

HOT ON THE RIGHT:

"'Have you fed any children today?': Lawmaker films himself heckling antiabortion protesters," from Marisa Iati: "The confrontation outside a Planned Parenthood clinic in Philadelphia escalated quickly. A

contentious appearance on NBC's Late Night on Tuesday night. But for the most part, she was able to keep things cordial with host Seth Meyers. Then, a few hours later, early Wednesday morning, her husband shared his unfiltered thoughts about the interview on Twitter. In a series of since-deleted tweets, Ben Domenech, the founder and publisher of conservative website The Federalist, went on an unhinged rant against the late-night host and former head writer for Saturday Night Live that was at times homophobic and at other times suggested

state legislator held up his phone and filmed himself saying the clinic was one of the most heavily protested in the country. Then he flipped the camera and approached a woman pacing the sidewalk with her back turned and a rosary in her hand. 'How many children have you put shoes on their feet today?' Pennsylvania state Rep. Brian Sims, a Democrat, asked the woman. … The incident, and another video in which Sims asks viewers to identify three young girls outside the clinic, have sparked outrage from Republican politicians and

that Meyers has only succeeded in comedy because he is a white man."

antiabortion activists, who said Sims's behavior amounted to harassment."

DAYBOOK:

Trump will deliver a speech on surprise medical billing and receive his intelligence briefing before welcoming the World Series champion Boston Red Sox to the White House.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

Former national security adviser H.R. McMaster said some of Trump's advisers constitute "a danger to the Constitution." He said one group of advisers consists of people "who are not there to give the president options—they're there to try to manipulate the situation based on their own agenda, not the president's agenda." Another group "cast themselves in the role of saving the country, even the world, from the president." "I think those latter two categories of people are actually a danger to the Constitution of the United States," the retired general said. (Daily Beast)

NEWS YOU CAN USE IF YOU LIVE IN D.C.:

-- It's going to be cloudy and breezy today with chances of rain. The Capital Weather Gang forecasts: "We have daily shower chances now through the weekend. Often, like today and Saturday, showers are light and limited. Downpours are most likely with thunderstorms along a cold front Friday evening, though they should be brief. Longer-lasting periods of rain are possible Saturday night through Sunday night."

-- The Nationals lost to the Brewers 7-3, capping a three-game sweep. (Sam Fortier)

-- D.C. lawmakers are considering a proposal that would limit public access to public records, shielding officials who use their government emails to conduct personal business. Peter Jamison reports: "The legislation, proposed by D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D), would also allow city agencies to reject records requests that don't include specific details about the documents being sought — including their subject matter, names of the sender and recipient, and a date range. Mendelson said he was introducing the changes at the request of the council's lawyer to reduce the amount of time that city officials are spending responding to requests under the District's Freedom of Information

Act."

-- Baltimore police arrested seven people in connection with protests involving the creation of a police force at Johns Hopkins University. A separate campus police force was approved by Maryland's Democratic-controlled state legislature and Republican governor, but critics say the move will harm relations between the university and nearby Baltimore residents. (Nick Anderson)

-- Maryland Republican voters widely favor Trump over their governor, Larry Hogan, for the White House. Erin Cox reports: "About 24 percent of GOP voters would support Hogan in a primary fight, while 68 percent would vote for Trump, the survey said. 'Republican primary voters in Maryland, and probably across the country, they like Donald Trump and they see no reason to replace him,' pollster Patrick Gonzales said. 'Republican voters in Maryland also really like Larry Hogan, but it's just not a compelling case for a primary challenge.'"

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

Seth Meyers found it fascinating that Trump lost over $1 billion in 10 years:

Samantha Bee looked into the organizational drama occurring inside the National Rifle Association:

A 12-year-old explained how he responded when a shooter attacked his school:

Mike Pompeo congratulated Prince Harry and Meghan on the birth of their son while the secretary of state was visiting London:

Pompeo: Royal baby's birth was 'good news on both sides of the Atlantic'

And a doorbell camera captured the moment an Oklahoma man was bitten by a five-foot snake:

'Take me to the hospital!': Doorbell camera video shows terrifying moment snake strikes man's face

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